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FWC INVESTIGATES CAUSE OF EAST COAST SEABIRD DEATHS

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has received reports of more than 200 dead or sick greater shearwaters, a gull-like bird, since Saturday along Florida's east coast. The birds have been found from Hobe Sound in Martin County to South Ponte Vedra Beach in St. Johns County.

Local wildlife rehabilitators report receiving numerous emaciated and dehydrated birds as well. FWC biologists are examining the dead birds to investigate the cause of this die-off.

Researchers with FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute are calling the die-off of birds significant and have collected some of the birds for testing. Initial necropsy results are not definitive; however, preliminary findings indicate starvation during the migration process played a role. Additional test results are pending.

"As only one species appears to be affected and the sick and dead birds have similar symptoms, we believe the seabirds are suffering from the same ailment," said Dan Wolf, research biologist. "In 2005, a similar, but less severe shearwater die-off occurred."

According to the Peterson Field Guide for Eastern Birds, shearwaters spend their lives at sea, well offshore in the open ocean except for when they breed, nest and rear young. Greater shearwaters breed primarily on Tristan da Cunha Island in the South Atlantic and wander the sea north to Greenland and Iceland, and back. Storms at sea can weaken the birds and cause them to become sick, dehydrated and die.

The public can assist the investigation by reporting sick, injured or dead birds to park staff, or online by clicking this [link](#). The public is asked not to handle birds and to contact a local wildlife rehabilitative facility for assistance with sick or injured birds. The online wild bird mortality database is a cooperative program between FWC and the Florida Department of Health to monitor bird health.